11 April 69

Harold;

Reference to the following:

CE 2968: Hoover letter to Rankin, paragraph 3; C6 equals CE 543.

Nicol at 3H~~510~~ 508-510: discussion of unique marks on the base of CE 543.

CEs 619-624: illustrations for Nicol testimony.

Remember those marks on the base of CE 543? These are the ones that raised speculation that the cartridge might have been fed into another M-C than "Oswald's". Nicol was wrong; I am almost sure of it (it is an honest error, one that both John Nichols and I made because we did not understand the unusual way the M-C extractor works.)

I think I know what caused those marks; I am almost sure of it. I wrote to Nichols and he will do tests.

I don't have time to explain the technical terms or to describe the feeding of cartridge base into the bolt face, so I'll trust either that you understand or that you can get advice from somebody who can show you. I will speak as though this were certain, but understand that it must first be tested.

The M-C did make those marks, and they were made in the course of an operation that I described in my recent long letter to Nicol.

In order to feed an empty case into the chamber so that the primer can be fired, you have to remove the bolt and slide the case base under the extractor and into the bolt face. Nicol did not understand this, for he was not shown the rifle in action-- all he saw was the bolt, and that is not enough to understand how this extractor works. It is not like the usual extractor. There are only two ways of feeding cartridges into the chamber and fully seating them; that is, fully closing the bolt over them. You must either feed a loaded cartridge from the clip, or you must remove the bolt and proceed as I described before.

If you manually place a case or cartridge into the chamber, the bolt will not close over it, for in this rifle the extractor does not strike the base and then snap around the rim and grasp the inside of the rim. Most rifles have another type of extractor.

Here is what happened, as I reconstruct it. I'll call the man who does this "Framer". All this happens only with CE 543, the cartridge that has these three marks which could not be associated with the M-C and

did not occur in the other two evidence case or in any of the tests.

Framer pulled the bullet from CE 543. He inserted the case manually in the chamber with the intent of blasting the primer-- that is,he just dropped the case in the chamber or eased it in with his fingers. He then drove the bolt forward, but the bolt would not close over the cartridge case (it cannot, when loaded in this fashion). When he drove the bolt home he rammed the case base and caused one set of marks (I guess these are marks of the forward edge of the extractor). Framer could not understand why the bolt would not close. He removed the case from the chamber (probably with a ramrod thrust into the muzzle), and again droped it into the chamber (perhaps thinking that the case was not lined up properly). He tried to close the bolt, but failed a second time, and he left a second set of marks. Framer did the same thing once more, failed again, and left a third set of marks. Finally he got wise and tried something else, and eventually wound up removing the bolt and slipping the case base into the bolt face.

Framer made all of his mistakes on CE543, and marked the hell into it. By the time he got around to CE 544/545, he knew how to get empty cases into the chamber, so he did not mark these. The diploma for his education is etched into the brass of CE 543, the dented case mouth and the three sets of marks on the base.

Nicol, Nichols and I made the same error.

I can see no other explanation for the three sets of marks; and it ties in perfectly with what I said before.

Tell me this: if you go to the Archives and ask to see the cases, to hold them, what happens? do they just show you a picture, or do they let you have them?

I would like to have them in my hands, the cases and Frazier's test cases, or good close-up color photos of all the surfaces of all of them. Nichols has sent to the archives and asked for close-up photos of the dents. That's good, if we can get them, but not enough.

I got Overstreet, but won't read it for a while, for I am extremely busy reading term papers and soon marking exams.

Still

Dick

Bernabei

Here is another point of difference to look for: the inside of fired cases is scorched (black) by the burning powder. Blast of primer alone may cause this, too, but I don't it.

If you have time, go to the archives and look at these cases with a witness. We should at least get a good look at them, if not photos, as insurance against doctoring.